

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4494

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3473

NODIS CHEROKEE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US, IS

SUBJ: SYRIAN FRUSTRATION OVER SINAI ACCORD

REF: STATE 210908

1. HAVE CONVEYED YOUR MESSAGE TO PRESIDENCY FOR ASAD RE NEWSWEEK ARTICLE. YOUR WORDS PLUS PROMPT DENIAL BY DEPARTMENT'S SPOKESMAN YESTERDAY SHOULD CLOSE OUT THIS INCIDENT.

2. AFTER RECEIVING HIS DEMARCHE RE NEWSWEEK YESTERDAY, I TOLD KHADDAM I HAD READ BAATH NATIONAL COMMAND STATEMENT DENOUNCING SINAI ACCORD. FOUND ITS PRESENTATION FAMILIAR AND CONSONANT WITH THEMES PRESIDENT HAD EARLIER STRESSED TO YOU WITH EXCEPTION OF THE REFERENCE TO THE US. WOULD HE PLEASE EXPLAIN WHAT WAS MEANT BY THE STATEMENT THAT THE ACCORD HAD CAUSED THE US TO BECOME A DIRECT PARTY TO THE CONFLICT WHILE THE ARAB STATES HAD BEEN FOCUSED ON GETTING THE US OUT OF THE CONFLICT?

3. KHADDAM REPLIED THIS MEANT THAT, AS RESULT OF ACCORD, US HAD BECOME MORE RATHER THAN LESS NEUTRAL IN ARAB/ ISRAELI CONFRONTATION. WHEN I EXPRESSED ASTONISHMENT AT THIS REASONING, KHADDAM SIMPLY SWITCHED TRACKS AND SAID HE HOPED WE RECOGNIZED THE CAREFUL DRAFTING WHICH HAD GONE INTO THE COMMUNIQUE AND OVERALL CALMNESS OF ITS TONE. I SAID
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I HAD APPRECIATED ITS RELATIVE RESTRAINT. KHADDAM THEN

SAID, IN QUIET AND SOMBER MANNER CONTRASTING WITH HIS NORMAL AGGRESSIVENESS, THAT HE WAS CONVINCED USG HAD MADE SERIOUS ERROR IN ENCOURAGING THIS ACCORD. HARKING BACK TO HIS COMMENT OF AUGUST 18 (DAMASCUS 3171), HE ASSERTED SADAT WAS NOW IN SERIOUS DANGER OF BEING OVERTHROWN. WHETHER THIS OCCURS IN TWO MONTHS OR TWO YEARS IS IMMATERIAL. SADAT WILL INEVITABLY BE PUSHED OUT FOR HAVING ENTERED INTO AN ACCORD AT SUCH VARIANCE WITH THE MAIN THRUST OF ARAB WORLD THINKING. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, SADAT'S SUCCESSOR WILL INEVITABLY BE HOSTILE TO THE US AND "WHAT GAIN WILL YOU HAVE ACHIEVED?"

4. I REPLIED OBVIOUSLY THERE WERE RISKS IN THE PRESENT SITUATION, PARTICULARLY WERE IT TO BECOME FROZEN. WE HAD HAD THE CHOICE OF ACTION VERSUS INACTION. INACTION ON OUR PART WE DEEMED WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE DANGEROUS. FURTHERMORE, WE HAD BEEN ASKED TO STAY INVOLVED AND TO HELP. AFTER MARCH WE HAD MOVED IN THE ONLY DIRECTION AND ON THE ONLY FRONT WE CONSIDERED POSSIBLE. AS YOU AND PRESIDENT FORD HAD REPEATEDLY STRESSED, WE DO NOT ACCEPT A STALEMATE AND SHOULD THE SITUATION BECOME FROZEN IT WOULD BE DESPITE OUR INTENTIONS AND CONTINUING BEST EFFORTS. AT SAME TIME, WE ARE REALISTIC AND RECOGNIZE WE CAN NOT MASTERMIND MOVES OF ALL THE OTHER PLAYERS WHETHER IN DAMASCUS, AMMAN OR THE PLO. EACH HAD ITS ROLE TO PLAY AND MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO HELP PEACE PROCESS ALONG OR OBSTRUCT IT.

5. KHADDAM RESPONDED THAT AS ASAD HAD TOLD YOU, SYRIA WOULD REACH ITS DECISION ON WHETHER TO ENGAGE IN FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS IN CLOSE COORDINATION WITH JORDAN AND THE PLO. ITS DECISION WOULD BE TAKEN ONLY AFTER CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF ALL POSSIBILITIES. DAMASCUS WAS SLAMMING NO DOORS. NONETHELESS IT CONSIDERED THAT THE SINAI ACCORD HAD ITSELF SERVED EFFECTIVELY TO BLOCK FUTURE PROGRESS. HE STRESSED "ARAB PUBLIC OPINION" INCLUDING SYRIAN WAS NOW DEEPLY DISTURBED.

6. KHADDAM THEN BURST OUT WITH EXASPERATION ABOUT YOUR ESTIMATE THAT SYRIA WOULD HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL AFTER OUR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING FROM NEGOTIA-
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TIONS RE GOLAN. I CORRECTED HIM THAT YOU HAD SAID THOSE NEGOTIATIONS MIGHT LAST UNTIL NEXT SUMMER BUT THAT YOU HAD FRANKLY ADMITTED THAT IF THEY WERE NOT FINISHED THEN THEY MIGHT HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL AFTER OUR ELECTIONS. RE-ITERATED THAT WE WOULD NEED DAMASCUS COOPERATION IN ANY SUCH NEGOTIATION BUT WERE NOT PRESSING FOR DECISION. HE SHRUGGED THIS ASIDE SAYING THERE APPEARED TO BE VERY LITTLE THAT SYRIA COULD IN ANY CASE EXPECT TO WIN IN

NEGOTIATIONS RE GOLAN.

7. SYRIAN RADIO HAS REPORTED THAT AFTER CALLING IN SOVIET AMBASSADOR YESTERDAY AFTERNOON TO PRESENT HIM WITH COPY OF BAATH PARTY COMMUNIQUE ATTACKING ACCORD, KHADDAM MADE LIGHTNING ROUND TRIP TO SEE KING KHALID. EARLY TODAY HE LEFT FOR ALGIERS WITH AN ASAD MESSAGE FOR BOUMEDIENE.

8. I SUSPECT THAT LEADERSHIP'S MOOD OF FRUSTRATION HERE IS SHARPENED BY ITS CURRENT SENSE OF IMPOTENCE. JETTING KHADDAM AROUND ARAB CAPITALS WITH MESSAGES FROM ASAD NEED NOT MEAN ASAD HAS FORMULATED A NEW STRATEGY. I HAVE HEARD NO HINT OF A SERIOUS ALTERNATIVE SYRIAN PLAN FOR ACTION OTHER THAN MOVING TO TIGHTEN ITS TIES WITH AMMAN AND PLO. (FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH OUR CONTACTS WITH PRIVATE SYRIANS AND OFFICIALS BELOW THE POLICY MAKING LEVEL INDICATE PREVAILING ASSUMPTION STILL IS THAT SYRIA WILL ENGAGE IN TALKS RE GOLAN DURING COMING MONTHS.)

7. RECOMMEND THIS MESSAGE BE PASSED CAIRO, AMMAN AND TEL AVIV.
MURPHY

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